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THE MIDDLE RHINE FESTIVAL.

THE approach of Whitsuntide brings with it the recurrence of these pleasant gatherings of musicians from all parts of Germany, and other countries, which annually take place at Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Aix. The meeting this year is at Düsseldorf, and so many pleasant recollections of former "music feasts" are awakened within us, that we are induced to suggest to those who can afford a holiday—how readily the Rhine is now to be reached, and that a visit in early *Spring* has many novelties, even for those who have followed the English tide which sets up that river every *Autumn*. The meeting is essentially German; the rehearsals commence many days before Whit Sunday, when a thorough appreciation of the music may be obtained by listener and performer. Then there are the cordial evening gatherings at the common supper table, where musical celebrities may be met on easy neutral terms. It was here that Mendelssohn, in 1836, wrote and produced his *St. Paul*, and for many years he was a centre of attraction, on occasions when other of his glorious works were heard for the first time. Successive directors have been enabled to sustain the interest and *bonhomie* through many years, and the rivalry between the towns aids the friendly competition. Aix lately invited Madlle. Jenny Lind, and this year Düsseldorf prevails with Madame Clara Novello to steal away in mid-London season, for a visit to her old German admirers; the celebrity of her Handel singing, has induced the substitution of the *Messiah* for Bach's *Passione*, Handel being also a much greater novelty in Germany than in England. A Psalm by Hiller, Gluck's *Alceste*, Beethoven's 9th Hymn, &c., are in the programme.

Professor Schumann, the conductor, with a modesty worthy of imitation by men whose works are without his great popularity, gives hardly any thing of his own composition. The festival days are the 15th, 16th, and 17th May.

MUSICAL TASTE—ITS ADVANCEMENT.

THE gradual increase, yearly, in the number of the better kind of concerts, and the proportionate diminution of those of an inferior description, has from its positiveness, become a fact beyond dispute. It has been the lot of the writer for many years, to attend all the principal concerts in the metropolis; in the performance of this labour of love, he has been struck with the improvement of the fare provided for the audience, and not less so with the relish evinced for that improvement. Formerly, the annual benefit concerts of a few of the principal "concert singers" at the Hanover Square Rooms, were the only means (besides those of the Philharmonic Society, and the Managers of the Ancient Concerts) afforded to the patrons of music of hearing performed even that ordinary department of the art, which consisted principally of solos and glees. Beethoven and Mozart were avoided, because, from want of acquaintance with their works, the usual concert audience failed to appreciate their merits. We have the opportunity of referring to a file of concert bills which embraces all the entertainments given at the Hanover Square Rooms for years, and in glancing over these, we are impressed by the poverty of the materials of which the programmes were mostly comprised. In almost all cases, high aristocratic names were announced as the patrons of the various concerts, and

half-a-guinea was consequently invariably demanded for admission. The high rate of charges, however, had no relation to the quality of the entertainment—and yet we have seen the rooms crowded, and known the *entrepreneur* to receive a handsome surplus.

In former times, such was the rage amongst the aristocracy for the patronage of music, that "admission to Mrs. Lane's concerts, at which Mingotti, and the famous violinist Giardini used to perform," was considered one of the highest fashionable privileges.* Every effort was made to gain the proud distinction, "and," says the old musical historian, Burney, "*la padrona della casa* lost but few opportunities of letting them know the value she set upon her invitations." Whenever a benefit for one of her protégées was in contemplation—"Come," she would say, "give me five guineas"—a demand at once implicitly obeyed. Nor had any one who wished to be again admitted to such good company the courage to ask the reason for the demand, but waited the lady's pleasure to be informed that they were to be honored by a ticket for Giardini's or Mingotti's benefit. Such a patron as Mrs. Lane would indeed do much for the encouragement of music, especially as her choice usually fell where it was most justified.

The matters we have here referred to, are worth consideration. It is a well-known fact now, that scarcely any entertainment of a musical character has a chance of success, however cheap. We have no wish to bring forward the names of societies in proof of our assertion, but we believe the remark will be corroborated by those who have had opportunities of inquiring into the financial state of some of the principal concert-giving societies. Nothing but the exertions of the members has prevented their dissolution. Where a large body is associated, the concerts are, of course, less dependent upon the support of the general public for success; the large connexion possessed by the members has, in many instances, been alone sufficient to keep matters straight.

As we have said, our experience in the concert matters gave us hopes that, day by day, the taste for the better order of music would increase: and we have seen that, without resorting to the abstruse, a higher standard of music has obtained ground, without returning to the Dark Ages of music—without diving into the deep recesses of antiquity, and drawing from thence the mouldering remains of crude and undigested compositions, valued at best only for their infirmity and ugliness, a spirit has of late years been manifested to encourage and improve the public acquaintance with works, which from their infrequent performance are almost unknown—at all events, quite unfamiliar to the general ear. Thus, we are not altogether impressed with the absolute necessity of such societies as the Musical Antiquarian, of which, by the bye, we have not heard for some time—nor with the Sebastian Bach Society, which if formed, has, we think, never commenced proceedings. More good has been, and is more likely to be done, by the Sacred Harmonic Society, the New Philharmonic, the Harmonic Union, Mr. Ella's Musical Union, and others of the same description. Nor is it necessary to discourage amateur societies upon a more humble scale, for we invariably find that, whatever may be the position attempted or taken up by new associations, the performance of

* Memoirs of the Opera in France, Germany, and England.